

The following is a copy of a research paper done by John Zimmerman, a senior at UCLA. John, his mother, Mrs. John Franklin Zimmerman, and his father, the late Professor Zimmerman, who taught European and Russian history at UCLA, have for many years summered at the Ocean Ave. home of Mrs. Gathercole, Mrs. Zimmerman's mother.

Colonial Plymouth

This paper will examine 4 major aspects of colonial Plymouth. These include the factors that determined the establishment of Plymouth by the Pilgrims in 1620; plan and construction of the town itself; distribution of land in and around Plymouth; and the expansion of Plymouth colony with the subsequent decline in importance of Plymouth-town. The examination of Plymouth will be confined to the years 1620-1644.

Introduction

On Wednesday, Sept. 6, 1620, the Mayflower sailed toward the New World with crew and 104 passengers. Of the 104, 41 persons were "separatists" from the Church of England, who, according to William Bradford (future governor of Plymouth colony), ventured to those "remote parts of the world" in order to propagate and advance the "gospel of the Kingdom of Christ." These separatists (later called Pilgrims) were the dominant and controlling force of the new colony established at Plymouth. Their ambition was to create a community, where they had liberty to worship God in their own way, which was to live according to the tenets of the New Testament.

The Pilgrims secured a patent from the Virginia Company with the understanding that they (the Pilgrims) would settle somewhere near the mouth of the Hudson. The terms of the contract were harsh -- the Adventurers (merchant capitalists) would bear the cost of ship hiring, supplies, and transportation; in return the colonists "must work for them at fishing, fur trading, lumbering, or whatever means of profit they found for 7 years." At the end of 7 years, each colonist (over 16) who had labored for 7 years would receive one share worth 10 pounds, and each adventurer would receive the same for every 10 pounds of his investment. All land would then be divided on this basis. Thus a "family of husband, wife and 3 children who had worked 7 years would get exactly the same dividend as a capitalist who had invested about \$250." Many would not agree to the terms of the patent, but those who did left on the Mayflower.

During May, fair winds usually prevail on a trans-Atlantic crossing, but the Mayflower sailed in September -- the season of westerly gales. The crossing was slow and rough. Instead of following the usual route -- using the easterly tradewinds near the Canaries to "waft" across to the West Indies and Florida, and then follow the coast northward -- Captain Jones steered a straight course. The southern route might have provided a shorter and easier passage, but the Mayflower would have run the risk of capture by the Spanish or being wrecked off Cape Hatteras.

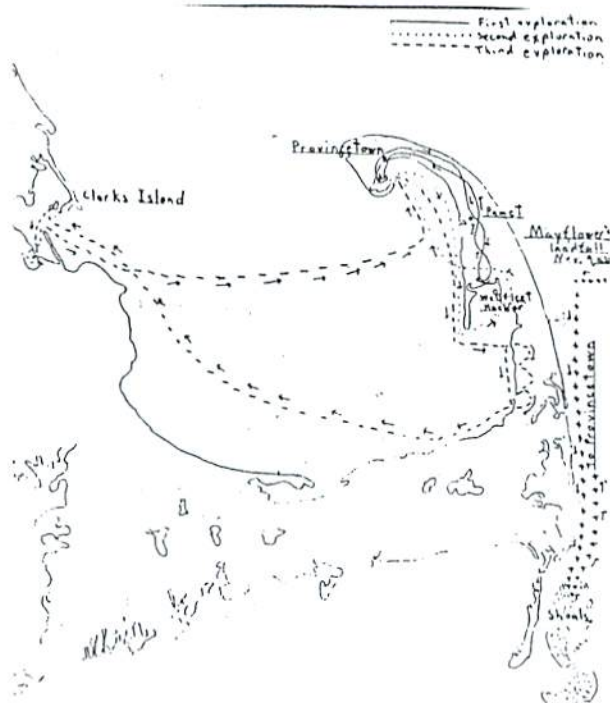
Land, Exploration and Settlement

Two hours after sun broke the horizon on Nov. 9, 1620, the highlands of Cape Cod were sighted. Recognizing the coastal geography, Captain Jones turned south toward the Hudson River, but as Bradford explains: "they fell amongst dangerous shoals and roaring breakers, and they resolved to bear up againe for the Cape...." The Mayflower anchored off Long Point in Cape Cod Harbor (Provincetown). Although the Pilgrims had no rights in New England, the Virginia Company allowed "leaders of any plantation...to...form as association to make orders and ordinances, etc., until a form of government had been settled." The Compact silenced those who had threatened to "use their own liberty" when ashore, because New England did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Virginia Company patent. The Compact was unique because it established a government based on consent at a time when "England's liberties were still conditioned by the remnants of feudalism." Moreover it provided a basis for local self-government.

The Mayflower lay off Long Point for 5 weeks while her members searched for a suitable site for settlement. As the Pilgrims explored Cape Cod, "certain geographical necessities were kept in mind." The harbor chosen was of critical importance because the Pilgrims remained economically tied to England and hoped to establish fishing as their mainstay. Therefore, the easy coming and going of ships needed to be assured. The distance from anchorage to the shore and adequacy of land-sites had also to be considered. Protection against the elements was also important. Certain natural defenses were indispensable in order to ward off hostile intruders, either European or Indian. The availability of fresh water and fertile land were crucial issues.

The Pilgrims made as complete a survey of the area as could be expected considering the onset of winter and dwindling supplies. The explorations may be divided into 2 phases -- the first in search of a general location for settlement which uncovered Provincetown, Pamet, Wellfleet and Plymouth Harbors, the second, the exploration of Plymouth Harbor for a permanent site.

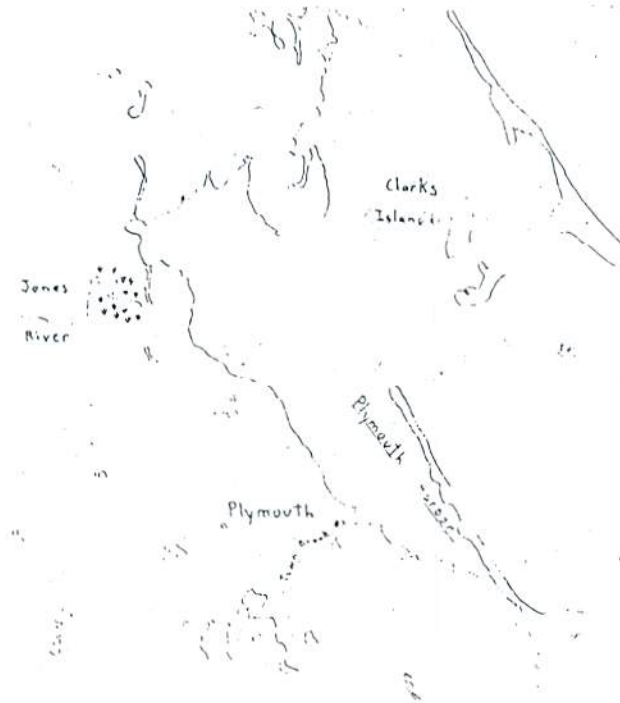
The first phase consisted of 3 separate expeditions (figure 1). The first expedition explored Pro-



vincetown and Pamat. Provincetown had a good harbor and an abundant supply of "sweet" woods -- oaks, pines, junipers, sassafras -- but small boats could not land easily, and the area lacked a supply of fresh water. Pamat Harbor was convenient for boats but not ships. There were abundant cleared areas, which indicated the presence of fertile lands once used by the Indians and which might immediately be exploited. Like Provincetown, it lacked fresh water and therefore was rejected. During the second expedition, Wellfleet Harbor was briefly explored but was not chosen because it too lacked fresh water.

During the last exploratory campaign to find a general location, a shallop was caught in a storm and "found" its way to Clark's Island, approximately 3 miles northeast of Plymouth Harbor. We find that in the ensuing days members of the expedition "sounded the harbor, and founde it fitt for shipping; and marched into the land, and found diverse cornfields, and little brooks, a place (as they supposed) fitt for situation...."

Within the general area, 3 sites -- Clark's Island, Jones River and Plymouth -- were considered as possible locations for permanent settlement (figure 2). Jones River had salt meadows where hay could be



cut, but behind the meadows lay thick woods which would provide cover for hostile Indians and prevent planting until cleared. Also, there was no good landing place at the mouth of the Jones River. Despite its natural defenses, Clark's Island lacked fresh water and many parts were rocky. The Pilgrims finally chose Plymouth -- a site just "north of one of the larger brooks (Town Brook) flowing into the inner harbor and on rising ground that culminated close to the water's edge in a line of hills (a good location for defensive purposes) reaching 120 ft. in height." The flow of the brook created a boat channel through the mudflats and just outside its mouth was Plymouth rock. This boulder was "connected" to the shore with square logs and provided a convenient landing spot. The Pilgrims also found cleared areas and abundant supply of fresh water.

Plymouth

A close examination of events leading up to the establishment of Plymouth and the site itself are crucial, for they reveal the following:

1. Despite the approaching winter and diminishing supplies the Pilgrims conducted a fairly extensive search for an appropriate site.

2. However, because of these constraints the Pilgrims stopped their search with Plymouth and did not explore territory to the north, which might have revealed Boston Harbor as a more suitable location.

3. The decision to locate near Town Brook was exceedingly wise for it was not only the "most defensible locality on the Bay, and the best place to get supplies ashore, it had the advantage of cleared land ready for the plow."

4. The Pilgrims finally chose Plymouth through "trial and error," apparently without using maps that were circulating in England, Holland and Spain

that showed the presence of Plymouth Harbor. The most valuable piece of information the Pilgrims could have used would have been John Smith's **Description of New England** (1616). It seems logical that the Pilgrims would not have "dallied for 5 November-December weeks, cold and wet, their food supplies running short, all the while searching the inner Cape Cod"...if they had read Smith's description of Plymouth as an "excellent and good harbor, good land; and not want of anything but industrious people."

5. Plymouth generated income through fur trading and not fishing as originally intended, as it was too far south of the best fisheries.

6. The patent secured from the Virginia Company was not valid for a settlement at Plymouth. In 1630 the Pilgrims applied for a new patent and received one from the council for New England which granted to Plymouth all of "New England southeast of a line from southern shore of Boston Bay to the point of Narragansett Bay...." However, the Great Seal was not attached to this document and, therefore, it was not a royal charter. With a royal charter Plymouth would have achieved statehood, but instead was swallowed up by Massachusetts.

Land Distribution and Building

Although a "trial and error" procedure was used by the Pilgrims in finding a location for settlement, the town built at Plymouth was carefully planned. The Pilgrims were divided into 19 families with single males assigned to different families. The town was planned; each family was to "build its own house, and to have a plot 3 rods (49½ ft.) long and half a

rod (8 ft.) broad, for each member." The location of each family's plot was determined by a lottery and subsequently staked out. Myles Standish, the military commander, and the governor, William Bradford, were given bigger lots. Work also began on a common house. A short street was laid out on higher ground running parallel to the bank of Town Brook with room on either side for house lots. The fort, situated on Burial Hill, overlooked the harbor and surrounding area. The houses were constructed of squared and sawed timber, not logs. Houses had only one room and a large fireplace of stone and clay construction. The chimneys were made of straight sticks plastered in clay. The houses were built in the same fashion until 1631, when the first "building code" came into existence which forbade thatched roofs and wooden chimneys because of their flammable nature.

"Common Course" Modified

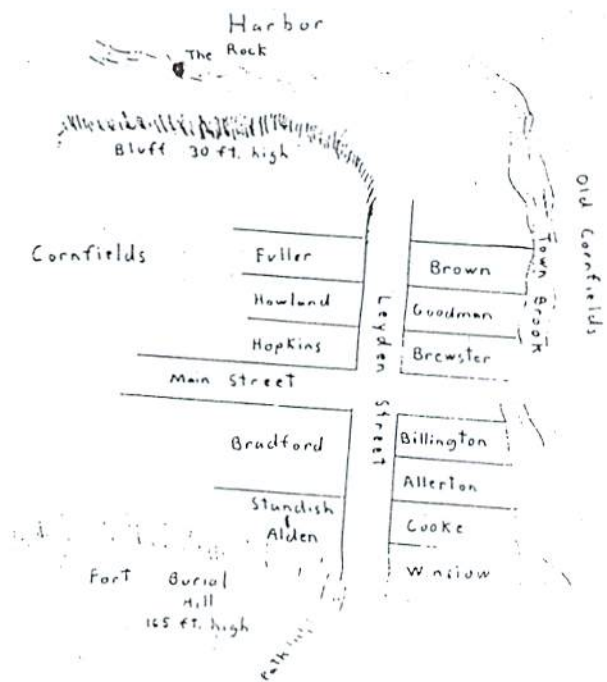
According to the agreement with the London Adventurers the Pilgrims were to work as a "gang" with no private property until 1627. However, everyone disliked the system. "Young bachelors didn't see why they should work for other men's wives and children; married women hated to cook and work for the bachelors; the strong and able got no more rations than the weak and lazy." To resolve this problem each family was assigned a definite planting field where they could grow their own corn. This policy was very successful for it "made all hands industrious...."

Land Distribution of 1624

By 1624 Plymouth contained 180 people living in 32 dwelling houses. The population had increased 3-fold since 1621 and a new land division was enacted. It created 97 new lots on some 200 acres of land.

Expansion and Decline

The rapid expansion of Plymouth colony during the 1630s increasingly reduced the importance of Plymouth-town. As immigrants came to Massachusetts they "brought plenty of money and goods to buy corn, cattle, and other food until they could start farms of their own." Since Plymouth was the nearest place to acquire these products, the Pilgrims found a market for all the cattle and corn they could grow. Plymouth could not satisfy the increasing demands of immigrant populations and as a result Pilgrims acquired land grants -- "great lots" -- in the present towns of Kingston, Duxbury and Marshfield in order to raise cattle and grow corn. In 1632 John Alden, Myles Standish, Jonathan Brewster and Thomas Prince, who had "great lots" at Duxbury, received permission to be dismissed



Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, September 3, 1981

from Plymouth Church and to form a church of their own. In 1637 Duxbury was recognized as a separate town from Plymouth. To the south the towns of Sandwich (1637), Barnstable (1639), and Yarmouth (1639) "sprang up." In 1644 Plymouth had returned to mere subsistence fishing and farming with wholesale emmigration of its inhabitants to "richer" lands. Bradford aptly described the dynamics of this

process and the importance of Plymouth vis-a-vis New England:

"And thus this poor church left, like an ancient mother grown old and forsaken of her children, though not in their affections yet in regard of their bodily presence and personal helpfulness; her ancient members being most of them worn away by death, and these of later time being like children translated into other families, and she like a widow left only to trust in God. Thus, she that had made many rich became herself poor."

Conclusion

The Pilgrims bravely sought out and established a settlement at Plymouth. Studying the events leading up to that settlement and location itself reveals important information as already discussed. At first, Plymouth seems to have been a wise choice for settlement, but as a long-term proposition that choice proved unlucky. It had no deep-water harbor, no river highway into the interior, and the soil was exhausted. There was only a very narrow strip of arable land on Plymouth Bay, with the back country too rugged and rocky for profitable agriculture. After the founding of Boston, ships passed up Plymouth, which "lay dead to windward of Cape Cod in the prevailing breezes, and where goods had to be lightered ashore instead of being landed on a wharf." Her importance decreased as expansion increased. However, Plymouth was crucial in New England development, especially Cape Cod, for it proved the basis and initial support to emerging communities.
